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ABSTRACT

This document traces the U.S. labor movement's history, documents its achievements, and describes its goals. The labor movement played a central role in the elevation of the U.S. standard of living through benefits negotiated by unions, such as vacations with pay, pensions, health and welfare protection, and grievance and arbitration procedures. In response to a need for an organized labor movement, representatives from a few trades and industries met at Pittsburgh on November 15, 1881, forming the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) evolved from this earlier organization and was formalized on December 8, 1886 with 300,000 members in 25 unions. In 1938, John L. Lewis left this federation, formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and quickly brought industrial unionism to large sectors of basic U.S. industry. The strength of the AFL and CIO, coupled with Roosevelt's domestic programs, led to passage of a number of national social programs. In 1955, the AFL and CIO reunited and formed the AFL-CIO. Full employment and the strengthening of free unions throughout the world are ongoing objectives of the AFL-CIO. A teacher's guide is provided that contains goals, objectives, key concepts, terms, people, events, and legislation. (SM)

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A SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN LABOR

American Federation of Labor and
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A Short History of American Labor

This brief history of more than 100 years of the modern trade union movement in the United States can only touch the high spots of activity and identify the principal trends of a "century of achievement." In such a condensation of history, episodes of importance and of great human drama must necessarily be discussed far too briefly, or in some cases relegated to a mere mention.

What is clearly evident, however, is that the working people of America have had to unite in struggle to achieve the gains that they have accumulated during this century. Improvements did not come easily. Organizing unions, winning the right to representation, using the collective bargaining process as the core of their activities, struggling against bias and discrimination, the working men and women of America have built a trade union movement of formidable proportions.

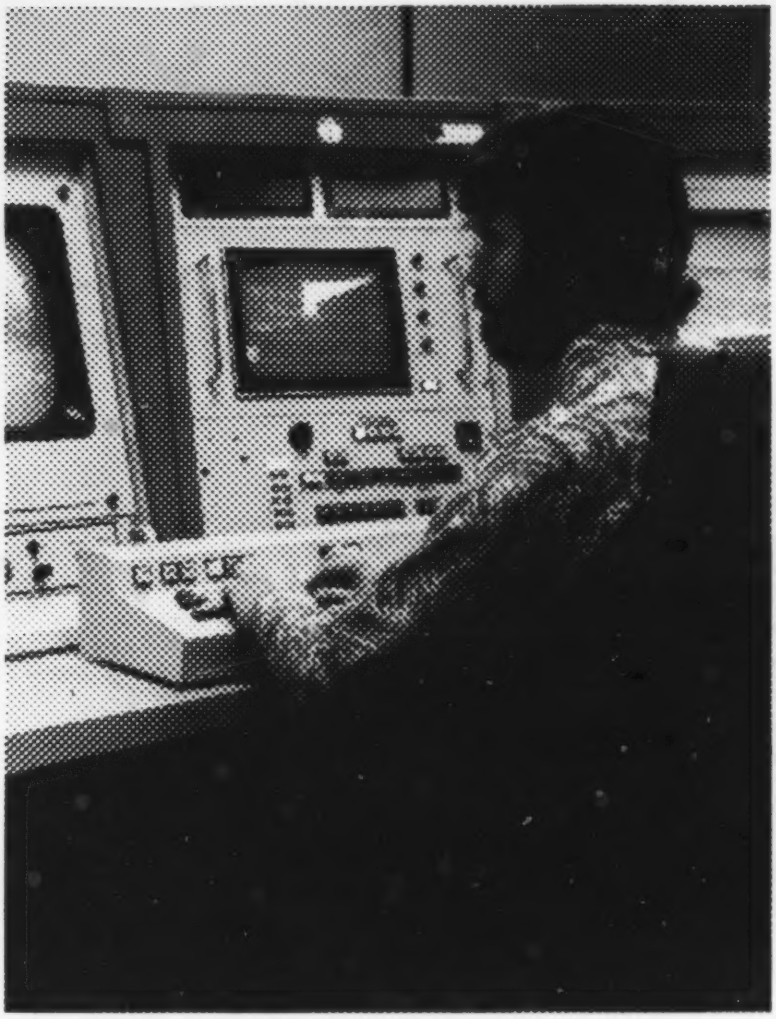
Labor in America has correctly been described as a stabilizing force in the national economy and a bulwark of our democratic society. Furthermore, the gains that unions have been able to achieve have brought benefits, direct and indirect, to the public as a whole. It was labor, for example, that spearheaded the drive for public education for every child. The labor movement, indeed, has served as a force for American progress.

American Labor's Second Century

Now, in the 1980s, as the American trade union movement looks toward its second century, it takes pride in its first "century of achievement" as it recognizes a substantial list of goals yet to be achieved.

In this past century, American labor has played a central role in the elevation of the American standard of living. The benefits which unions have negotiated for their members are, in most cases, widespread in

THIS ARTICLE is adapted from the AFL-CIO publication, "A Short History of American Labor," prepared for the 1981 Centennial of American labor.



the economy and enjoyed by millions of our fellow citizens outside the labor movement. It is often hard to remember that what we take for granted—vacations with pay, pensions, health and welfare protection, grievance and arbitration procedures, holidays—never existed on any meaningful scale until unions fought and won them for working people.

Through these decades, the labor movement has constantly reached out to groups in the American society striving for their share of opportunity and rewards . . . to the blacks, the Hispanics and other minorities . . . to women striving for jobs and equal or comparable pay . . . to those who work for better schools, for the freedom of speech, press and assembly guaranteed by the Bill of Rights . . . to those seeking to make our cities more livable or our rural recreation areas more available . . . to those seeking better health for infants and more secure status for the elderly.

Through these decades, in addition, the unions of America have functioned in an economy and a technology marked by awesome change. When the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions gathered in convention in 1881, Edison had two years earlier invented the electric light, and the first telephone conversation had taken place just five years before. There were no autos, no airplanes, no radio, no television, no air conditioning, no computers or calculators, no electronic games. For our modest energy needs—coal, kerosene and candles—we were independently self-sufficient.

The labor movement has seen old industries die (horse-shoeing was once a major occupation) and new industries mature. The American workforce, once predominantly "blue collar," now finds "white collar" employees and the "grey collar" people of the service industries in a substantial majority.

The workforce in big mass production industries has contracted, and the new industries have required employees with different skills in different locations. Work once performed in the United States has been moved to other countries, often at wage levels far below the American standards. Multinational, con-

glomerate corporations have moved operations around the globe as if it were a mammoth chessboard. The once thriving U.S. merchant marine has shriveled.

A new kind of "growth industry"—consultants to management skilled in the use of every legal loophole that can frustrate union organizing, the winning of representation elections, or the negotiation of a fair and equitable collective bargaining agreement—has mushroomed in recent years, and threatens the stability of labor-management relationships. A group of organizations generally described as the "new right" enlist their followers in retrogressive crusades to develop an anti-union atmosphere in the nation, and to repeal or mutilate various social and economic programs that have brought a greater degree of security and peace of mind to the millions of American wage earners in the middle and lower economic brackets.

Resistance to modest proposals like the labor law reform bill of 1977, and the use of lie detectors and electronic surveillance in probing the attitudes and actions of employees are a reminder that opposition to unions, while changing in style from the practices of a few decades ago, is still alive and flourishing—often financed by corporate groups, trade associations and extremist ideologues.

Yet through this dizzying process of change, one need remains constant—the need for individual employees to enjoy their human rights and dignity, and to have the power to band together to achieve equal collective status in dealing with multi-million and multi-billion dollar corporations. In other words, there is no substitute for the labor union.

American labor's responsibility in its second century is to adjust to the new conditions, so that it may achieve optimum ability to represent its members and contribute to the evolutionary progress of the American democratic society.

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland expressed that concept in his formal statement on labor's centennial in 1981:

"Labor has a unique role in strengthening contemporary American society and dealing adequately and forcefully with the challenge of the future.

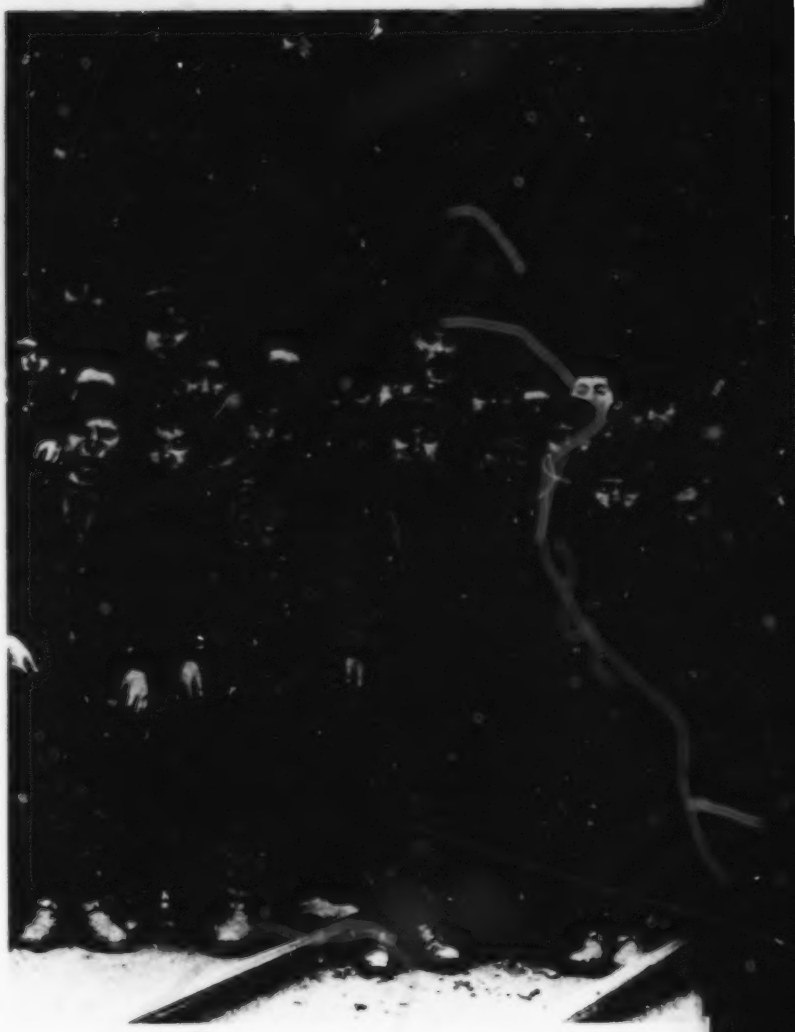
"We shall rededicate ourselves to the sound principle of harnessing democratic tradition and trade union heritage with the necessity of reaching out for new and better ways to serve all working people and the entire nation."

Toward a Federation of Labor

The roots of our country's trade unions extend deep into the early history of America. Several of the Pilgrims arriving at Plymouth Rock in 1620 were working craftsmen. Captain John Smith, who led the ill-fated settlement in 1607 on Virginia's James River, pleaded with his sponsors in London to send him more craftsmen and working people.

Primitive unions, or guilds, of carpenters and cordwainers, cabinet makers and cobblers made their appearance, often temporary, in various cities along the Atlantic seaboard of colonial America. Workers played a significant role in the struggle for independence; carpenters disguised as Mohawk Indians were the "host" group at the Boston Tea Party in 1773. The Continental Congress met in Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia, and there the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. In "pursuit of happiness" through shorter hours and higher pay, printers were the first to go on strike, in New York in 1794; cabinet makers struck in 1796; carpenters in Philadelphia in 1797; cordwainers in 1799. In the early years of the 19th century, recorded efforts by unions to improve the workers' conditions, through either negotiation or strike action, became more frequent.

By the 1820s, various unions involved in the effort to reduce the working day from 12 to 10 hours began to show interest in the idea of federation—of joining



"Boy wanted" sign drew a crowd (above), while breaker boys (right) already had jobs.

together in pursuit of common objectives for working people.

Puny as these first efforts to organize may have been, they reflected the need of working people for economic and legal protection from exploiting employers. The invention of the steam engine and the growing use of water power to operate machinery were developing a trend toward a factory system not much different from that in England which produced misery and slums for decades. Starting in the 1830s and accelerating rapidly during the Civil War, the factory system accounted for an ever-growing share of American production. It also produced great wealth for a few, grinding poverty for many.

With workers recognizing the power of their employers, the number of local union organizations increased steadily during the mid-19th century. In a number of cities, unions in various trades joined together in city-wide federations. The National Trades' Union, formed in 1834 by workers in five cities, was an early attempt at countrywide federation—but the financial panic of 1837 put an end to its efforts. In 1866 several national associations of unions functioning in one trade—printers, machinists, stone cutters, to name a few—sent delegates to a Baltimore meeting that brought forth the National Labor Union. Never very strong, it was a casualty of the sweeping economic depression of 1873.

Five years later, the Knights of Labor captured the public imagination. The Knights were an all-embracing organization committed to a cooperative society. Membership was not limited to wage earners; it was open to farmers and small business people—everybody, that is, except lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers, professional gamblers and anyone involved in the sale of alcoholic beverages. The Knights achieved a membership of nearly 750,000 during the next few years, but the skilled and unskilled workers who had joined the Knights in hope of improvement in their hours and wages found themselves frustrated by the Knights' vague organizational structure, by its officers' aversion to strikes against employers and by its leaders' reliance on the promise of future social gains instead of the hard day-to-day work of building and operating a union organization. So the stage was set for the creation of a down-to-earth, practical labor federation which could combine long range objectives of a better society with the practical activity of day-to-day union functions.

Federation of Organized Trades & Labor Unions

The first practical step in response to the need for a united labor movement was a meeting of workers' representatives from a few trades and industries at Pittsburgh on Nov. 15, 1881. The delegates came from the carpenters, the cigar makers, the printers, merchant seamen, and the steel workers, as well as

Executive Council of the Federation, 1881 (above). A "reader" in a cigar factory in the 1880s (below).

from a few city labor bodies and a sprinkling of delegates from local units of the Knights of Labor.

The new Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions which they created had a constitution inspired by that of the British Trades Union Congress —which then was about a dozen years old. Its principal activity was legislative, its most important committee was concerned with legislation. The chairman of that committee was 31-year-old Samuel Gompers of the Cigar Makers Union, serving in the earliest phase of a career that was to make him the principal leader and spokesman for labor in America for the next four decades.

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions was a good deal less than a strongly effective organization. In its third year, it collected just $508 in dues, and its 1884 convention brought together merely 18 delegates. Yet its fingers were clearly on the pulse of America's working class; it passed a resolution decreeing that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886." It recommended to its affiliated unions that they "so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named." In the words of a much later cliché, the federation's call for the 8-hour day was clearly "an idea whose time had come." It touched off, or accelerated, a strong and vociferous national clamor for the shorter work week.

Despite the popularity of that call for action, Gompers and a number of his associates—among them, particularly, Peter J. McGuire of the Brotherhood of Carpenters—felt the time had come for reorganizing the Federation to make it a more effective center for the trade unions of the country. So, on Dec. 8, 1886, they and a few other delegates met in Columbus, Ohio, to create a renovated organization.

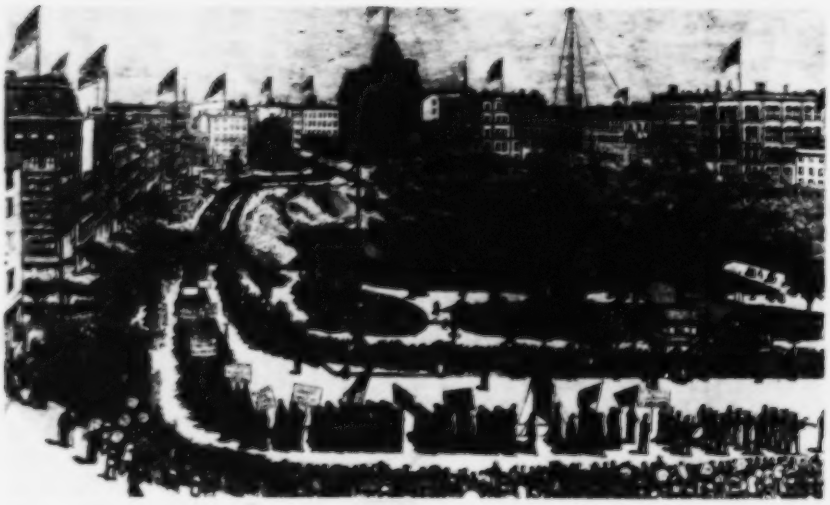
It was at this meeting that the American Federation of Labor evolved from the earlier Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. The action was a giant step forward toward the development of a modern trade union movement in America. Gompers was elected president, McGuire secretary. Gompers, born in 1850, came as a boy with his parents to America from the Jewish slums of London; he entered the cigar-making trade and received much of his education as a "reader"—a worker who read books, newspaper stories, poetry and magazine articles to fellow employees to help break the monotony of their work in the shop—and became a leader of his local union and of the national Cigar Makers Union.

A statement by the founders of the AFL expressed their belief in the need for more effective union organization. "The various trades have been affected by the introduction of machinery, the subdivision of labor, the use of women's and children's labor and the lack of an apprentice system—so that the skilled trades were rapidly sinking to the level of pauper labor," the AFL declared. "To protect the skilled labor of America from being reduced to beggary and to sustain the standard of American workmanship and skill, the trades unions of America have been established."

The leadership of the early labor movement showed a keen awareness that the unions could not succeed with a "men only" philosophy, even though men were then the clearly dominant element in the labor force. In 1882 the Federation extended to "all women's labor organizations representation . . . on an equal footing." Even more explicitly—and rather grandiloquently—the AFL convention in 1894 adopted a resolution that "women should be organized into trade unions to the end that they may scientifically and permanently abolish the terrible evils accompanying their weakened, unorganized state; and we demand that they receive equal compensation with men for equal services performed."

The new AFL, with its 300,000 members in 25 unions, came on the national scene in a time of discord and struggle. Earlier in 1886, railroad workers in the Southwest had been involved in a losing strike against the properties of Jay Gould, one of the more

New York's first labor day parade (right) was held in 1882, an era when management dealt with unions by ignoring them and dealt with strikes (below and right) by breaking them with violence.



flamboyant of the so-called "robber barons" of the post-Civil War period. On May 1, 1886, some 200,000 workers had struck in support of the effort to achieve the 8-hour day.

While the national 8-hour-day strike movement was generally peaceful, and frequently successful, it led to an episode of violence in Chicago that resulted in a setback for the new labor movement. The McCormick Harvester Company in Chicago, learning in advance of the planned strike, locked out all its employees who held union cards. Fights erupted and the police opened fire on the union members, killing four of them. A public rally at Haymarket Square to protest the killings drew a large and peaceful throng. As the meeting drew to a close, a bomb exploded near the lines of police guards, and seven of the uniformed force were killed, with some 50 persons wounded. The police began to fire into the crowd; several more people were killed and about 200 were wounded.

Eight anarchists were arrested and charged with a capital crime. Four were executed; four others were eventually freed by Gov. John P. Altgeld of Illinois after he concluded that the trial had been unfairly conducted. No one knows for certain who planted the bomb. But as Gompers ruefully commented some time later: "The bomb not only killed the policemen, but it killed our eight-hour movement for a few years after."

The new AFL, breaking with the cloudy organizational structure that had hampered the Knights of Labor and other previous attempts at federation, placed emphasis on the autonomy of each affiliated union in its jurisdiction, and encouraged the development of practical collective bargaining to gain improvements for the membership. But it takes two to make collective bargaining work — employers and workers — and as American industry moved into a period of immense growth and power in the latter part of the 19th century, the lords of industry were little inclined to negotiate with the unions of their employees. The Sherman Antitrust Act, designed to break up the power of monopoly corporations, was used very strongly against small unions, contrary to its intent. And so, the companies grew in strength while their lawyers fought successful rearguard actions to make the law inoperative.

Thus the decade of the 1890s and the early years of the 20th century witnessed many intense struggles between essentially weak unions seeking to liberate their members from back-breaking toil under often unsafe and unhealthy working conditions for very low wages, and powerful corporations with heavy financial resources, the active or passive support of the government and its police forces, and the backing of much of the press and the general public. It was a perfect climate for union-busting and violence.

In 1891 steel boss Henry C. Frick broke a Pennsylvania strike of coke oven workers seeking the 8-hour day. But that was just a warmup event for Frick, who as head of the Carnegie Steel Company in 1892 or-

dered a pay cut ranging from 18 to 26 percent. The Amalgamated Association of Iron & Steel Workers—one of the stronger unions of the period—called a strike at the Carnegie plant at Homestead, Pa., to seek a rescinding of the cut in wages. Pitched battles followed between the strikers and a boatload of 300 armed Pinkerton detectives. The strikers won the battle and the Pinkertons retreated, with a death toll of seven workers, three strikebreakers and scores of wounded. The state militia then took over the town. Indictments poured out, but no one was convicted; and Frick had succeeded in breaking the strike.

The next big confrontation, in 1894, was at the Pullman plant near Chicago. The American Railroad Union—not affiliated with the AFL and led by Eugene V. Debs, a leading American socialist—struck the company's manufacturing plant, and called for a boycott of the handling of Pullman's sleeping and parlor cars on the nation's railroads. Within a week, 125,000 railroad workers were engaged in a sympathy protest strike. The government swore in 3,400 special deputies; later, at the request of the railroad association, President Cleveland moved in federal troops to break the strike—despite a plea by Gov. Altgeld of Illinois that their presence was unnecessary. Finally a sweeping federal court injunction forced an end to the sympathy strike, and many railroad workers were blacklisted. The Pullman strikers were essentially starved into submissive defeat.

The strike illustrated the increasing tendency of the government to offer moral support and military force to break strikes. The injunction, issued usually and almost automatically by compliant judges on the request of government officials or corporations, became a prime legal weapon against union organizing and action.

A Testing Period and Growth

A better method of federal intervention occurred during a 1902 strike of anthracite coal miners, under the banner of the United Mine Workers. More than 100,000 miners in northeastern Pennsylvania called a strike on May 12, and kept the mines closed all that summer. When the mine owners refused a UMW proposal for arbitration, President Theodore Roosevelt intervened on Oct. 3, and on Oct. 16 appointed a commission of mediation and arbitration. Five days later the miners returned to their jobs, and five months later the Presidential Commission awarded them a 10 percent wage increase and shorter work days—but not the formal union recognition they had sought.

The difficulties that unions experienced in fashioning their strategies for bringing workers into membership and fighting low-wage non-union competition could best be observed in a long court fight which became nationally known as the Danbury Hatters case. In 1902, the AFL hatters union instituted a national boycott of a non-union company in Danbury, Conn. The company, charging a conspiracy in restraint of trade, under the provisions of the antitrust law, filed a damage suit in the state court but lost.

The case worked its way through the federal courts over the next few years, and in 1908 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision against the union. It held that the Hatters Union had participated in an illegal secondary boycott, which was subject to federal injunctive restraint. The decision was a clear signal to the federal judiciary and to the corporations that injunctions could be used to stop various kinds of labor strikes and strike-support actions. In addition, the individual strikers were fined a total of nearly $250,000. In 1915, the AFL proclaimed a Hatters' Day, in which workers voluntarily contributed an hour's pay to help pay off the fines. The money thus collected kept 184 individual Danbury hat workers from having their homes seized in order to pay the court-ordered levy. [It is important to differentiate between direct consumer boycotts or "unfair to labor" or "don't buy" activities, which are recognized as perfectly legal when conducted in connection with or in support of labor union disputes with employers—and, on the other hand, secondary boycotts, which were the issue in the Danbury Hatters case and which were made illegal under the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. A secondary boycott is one directed at companies or stores to try to force them not to use, or to offer for sale, products which have been made by a company involved in a strike or otherwise deemed "unfair" by the legitimate union. The secondary boycott has all but disappeared since Taft-Hartley was passed. It should be noted, however, that the courts have ruled that the Constitution's free speech provisions legally permit a union to place "informational pickets" outside a store selling "unfair" goods and calling attention to labor's "don't buy" campaign—so long as they do not call the store

itself "unfair" or ask the public not to patronize the establishment.]

This was not to be the first or last example of the way in which employers have sought to redirect the thrust of laws designed to regulate corporations and instead aimed them toward labor unions and their members. Indeed, even at the current time, efforts are still being made to include labor under the antitrust and other laws originally aimed at corporations.

Not all the strikes and struggles of the period were conducted by the "sons of toil" in the nation's heavy industries. Long before the rise of the contemporary feminist movement, large numbers of women were at work—particularly in the big cities and in the men's and women's garment industry. Their grievances were real and tangible in both the textile and garment industries. Their pay was often at sweatshop levels, their hours too long, the speed-up rampant, the working conditions dreadful. Conditions such as these led in 1909 to a strike known widely as "The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand." The strikers, mostly women, almost all of them recent immigrants from eastern Europe, conducted the first big protest in the needle trades under the banner of the Ladies' Garment Workers against shirtwaist and dress manufacturers. Their plight brought widespread public support, and they gained the 52-hour work week and wage increases.

In 1910, some 50,000 cloakmakers called a strike in New York. Thanks to the efforts of Louis D. Brandeis, a lawyer later named to the U.S. Supreme Court, the dispute ended on a constructive note. A "protocol of peace" designed by Brandeis established procedures for conciliation and arbitration of future grievance disputes, as well as such important advances as the abolition of homework, the free use of electricity, 10 paid holidays a year, and piece work at rates fixed by joint union-management committees.

But a reminder that the garment industry was a good deal this side of paradise occurred in 1911, when a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. on New York's lower east side. About 150 employees—almost all of them young women—perished when the fire swept through the upper floors of the loft building in which they worked. Many burned to death; others jumped and died. Why so large a casualty list? The safety exits on the burning floors had been securely locked, allegedly to prevent "loss of goods." New York and the country were aroused by the tragedy. A state factory investigation committee headed by Frances Perkins (she was to become Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of labor in 1933, the first woman cabinet member in history) paved the way for many long-needed reforms in industrial safety and fire prevention measures.

Another of the historic industrial conflicts prior to World War I occurred in 1912 in the textile mills of Lawrence, Mass. It was led not by an AFL union but by the radical Industrial Workers of the World—the

IWW, or the Wobblies, as they were generally known—an organization in frequent verbal and physical conflict with the AFL and its affiliates. The strike in Lawrence started when the mill owners, responding to a state legislature action reducing the work week from 54 to 52, coldly and without prior notice cut the pay rates by a 3½ percent. The move produced predictable results: a strike of 50,000 textile workers; arrests; fiery statements by the IWW leaders; police and militia attacks on peaceful meetings; and broad public support for the strikers. Some 400 children of strikers were "adopted" by sympathizers. When women strikers and their children were attacked at the railroad station by the police after authorities had decided no more youngsters could leave town, an enraged public protest finally forced the mill owners not only to restore the pay cuts but to increase the workers' wages to more realistic levels.

Perhaps the temper of the times in which working men and women sought to build their unions was epitomized by the attitude of George Baehr, head of the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Company, at

Women workers were featured in the 1912 Labor Day Parade (far left), as they fought sweatshop conditions in New York's garment district and suffered such tragedies as the 1911 Triangle fire (below left). Frances Perkins spent six years crusading for reform after the fire.

the time of the 1902 coal strike. In Mr. Baehr's publicly expressed view, "the rights and interests of the labor man will be protected and cared for not by the labor agitators but by the Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of the country and upon the successful management on which so much depends." Such an attitude did not leave much room for flexibility in developing more equitable labor-management relationships.

Yet not all of the news was of strike and struggle. By 1904, the AFL could claim a membership in its affiliated unions of nearly 1,700,000 members. Ten years later, at the eve of World War I, it had climbed to about 2 million.

There were, furthermore, important legislative accomplishments. Congress, at the urging of the AFL, created a separate U.S. Department of Labor with a legislative mandate to protect and extend the rights of wage earners. A Children's Bureau, with a major concern to protect the victims of job exploitation, was

Women In the Unions

A noteworthy event in the labor movement of the early 1900s was the creation of the Women's Trade Union League, to help educate women workers about the advantages of union membership, to support their demands for better working conditions, and to acquaint the public with the serious exploitation of the rising number of women workers, many of them in "home industries" or industrial sweatshops.

It was founded by Mary O'Sullivan, a bindery worker who became the first woman organizer employed by the AFL; Jane Addams, the noted social worker and founder of Chicago's Hull House; Mary Kehew, a Boston philanthropist, and women who were officials in the unions of the garment and textile industries.

For much of its first century, the labor movement was—in huge majority—composed of men. Except in a few occupations—clerical work and the garment, textile, retail and hotel industries—the labor force was essentially male.

Since World War II, however, women have moved increasingly into new occupations and larger numbers of women have become full-time wage earners. As more and more women went to work, their union membership climbed, passing 7 million in 1980.

In 1984, two women were serving on the AFL-CIO Executive Council as federation vice presidents. Women also head a major AFL-CIO staff department and a national affiliate, while others hold offices of increasing responsibility in their unions.

created. The LaFollette Seaman's Act required urgently needed improvements in the working conditions on ships of the U.S. merchant marine. Of crucial importance, the Clayton Act of 1914 made explicit the legal concept that "the labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce" and hence not subject to the kind of Sherman Act provisions which had been the issue in the Danbury Hatters case. The act gave a legal basis in the federal jurisdiction to strikes and boycotts and peaceful picketing, and dramatically limited the use of injunctions in labor disputes. Little wonder that AFL President Gompers hailed the Clayton Act as a "magna carta," probably not foreseeing that future court decisions and interpretations would seriously undermine the power of the language of the law.

The Adamson Act passed by Congress in 1916 concerning work hours on the railroads was an important milestone in the decades-long effort to achieve the 8-hour day, an objective of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions in 1884 and of many subsequent strikes. The 10-hour day—an improvement in its era—was introduced for federal government employees in 1840, but it took until the early years of the 20th century before the 8-hour work day became broadly accepted in the private sector, particularly in the printing and building trades. The mass production industries and the railroads continued their refusal to grant it.

The Adamson Act brought the shorter work day to railroad employees. It came in other industries through the impact of strikes, collective bargaining, state laws and two federal statutes: the Public Contracts Act in 1936, requiring contractors on government jobs to observe the 8-hour day, and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 which provided a maximum work week for employers in interstate commerce —first a maximum of 44 hours and, after two years, 40 hours a week.

Wartime Gains and Post-War Challenges

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the AFL under President Gompers' leadership worked in close cooperation with President Wilson to ensure industrial peace and a steady flow of military equipment and armaments for the American Expeditionary Force in Europe. As head of the War Committee on Labor and member of the Council for National Defense, Gompers and the unions he represented played an increasingly important role in national affairs. A wartime disputes board helped avoid strikes and maintain production; it had the support and cooperation of the labor movement. With the vast expansion of production for military and civilian needs, unions grew rapidly during the wartime years.

A symbolic recognition of labor's new status was President Wilson's visit to Buffalo in 1917 to address the annual AFL convention—the first time a President had made such an appearance. In succeeding Administrations most Presidents, Republican and Democratic alike, spoke to the labor conventions.

One effort in which Gompers worked hard and successfully was for the creation of the International Labor Organization, an inter-governmental body headquartered in Geneva, with government, labor and employer delegates and advisers, to discuss international problems directly affecting workers and to seek the elevation of work standards and the rights of workers in every country. The ILO was established under the Treaty of Versailles that followed World War I. Although the U.S. Senate finally refused to ratify the treaty, the American labor movement played an important role in ILO affairs beginning in 1934, and more intensely after World War II when the ILO became a specialized international agency of the United Nations.

During the years following World War I, however, the labor movement suffered setbacks and difficulties.

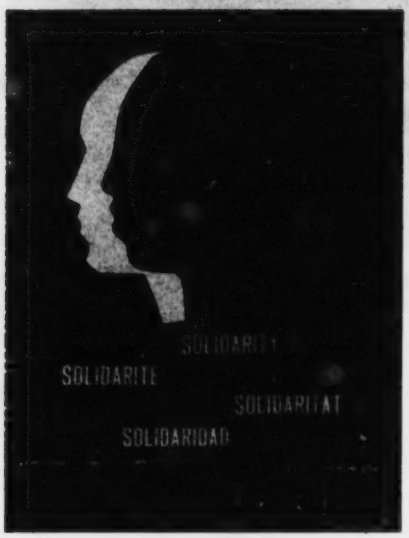
While AFL membership had reached almost 4 million by 1919, the postwar reaction from employers and their allies was swift and predictable. Elbert Gary, head of U.S. Steel (the company bestowed his name on the Indiana city), refused to meet with striking workers. The AFL endorsed and supported a strike of steel workers committed to such objectives as the end of the 12-hour day, the dismantlement of company-dominated "unions," collective bargaining and wage increases. Using massive propaganda which sought to depict the strike as "unpatriotic," plus such time-tested favorites as strikebreakers, spies, armed guards and cooperative police departments, "Big Steel" finally wore down the strikers, and they were forced to return to work early in 1920 under the old conditions.

Both the steel strike and an early post-war meat packing strike found employers—not for the first time nor the last—importing blacks from southern rural areas and Mexican peasants in order to serve as strikebreakers, usually without advance knowledge of that fact until they had to face the ordeal of being escorted through hostile picket lines. These random events, however, did not prevent the labor movement from playing a role of support for future civil rights activities and legislation.

The "Roaring Twenties," nostalgically depicted in some movies and musical comedies as an era of unbounded prosperity and champagne-induced gaiety, fell a good deal short of those marks for most American working people. Throughout the decade, unemployment rose, quietly, almost anonymously. It was a time of considerable hardship for many of the unemployed, long before the days of unemployment insurance or supplementary benefits.

The postwar depression brought wages down sharply and caused major erosion of union membership—a loss of about a million members in the years from 1920 to 1923. The difficulties were multiplied by

Labor's interest in international solidarity goes back a long way. AFL President Sam Gompers, third from left, goes bike-riding in England with friends from the British Trades Union Congress. An AFL-CIO poster of the 1950s stresses across-the-border friendships.



the decision of the National Association of Manufacturers and other anti-union "open shop" groups to wipe out or seriously diminish the status of American unions. The fear of "Bolsheviks," often hysterical, that was nurtured by the Russian communist revolution was used gleefully by the anti-union forces. As early as 1913, President John Kirby of the NAM had decided the trade union movement was "an un-American, illegal and infamous conspiracy." As the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, headed by Sen. Robert LaFollette Jr., reported years later, such demands as "union recognition, shorter hours, higher wages, regulation of child labor and the hours and wages of women and children in industry" came to be seen—under the influence of the NAM-sponsored 'American Plan' —as aspects of the alleged communist revolution from which the anti-labor employers wanted to save the nation. Strikebreaking, blacklisting and vigilanteeism became, for a time, acceptable aspects of this new and spurious brand of patriotism.

The "yellow dog contract," which workers had to

From Murdered Miners To Shiny Dimes

One chapter of the history of early-century industrial conflicts involved John D. Rockefeller, the first tycoon of the age of energy and the creator of the Standard Oil complex of corporations.

Rockefeller controlled the Colorado Fuel & Iron Corporation, whose coal miners went on strike in 1914. With their families, they were promptly evicted from company-owned homes in Ludlow, Colo.

They moved into a cluster of tents, around which National Guard soldiers took positions and at night occasionally fired their rifles into the colony. To protect the children, the miners dug a cave under the largest tent. But on Easter night 1914, company-hired gunmen and some of the National Guard poured oil over the strikers' tents and set them on fire.

As the frantic miners and their families ran for safety in the night, they were machine-gunned. Some escaped, some were wounded and 13 children and a pregnant woman in the recently dug cave all died—some with gun wounds, some from suffocation.

The nationwide protest against the killings on Rockefeller property were immediate and long sustained. Eventually, it led Rockefeller, the nation's first billionaire, to hire Ivy Lee, an early public relations man, to repair John D.'s sullied reputation.

Even as an old man, Rockefeller continued to hand out shiny new dimes to little children in the effort to erase the Ludlow image—but among the miners and workers in many other unions, the memory of Ludlow persists like an endless bad dream.

sign in order to get a job, bound them never to join a union; at the same time, the corporations promoted employee representation plans or company unions—pale and generally useless imitations of the real thing.

In 1924, faced with continual attacks and decisions by the Republican and Democratic parties to present the voters with the very limited choice between President Coolidge, a laissez faire conservative, and John W. Davis, a corporation lawyer, the AFL voted to support "neither of the above" but to make an endorsement for the first time in a presidential election. Senator LaFollette of Wisconsin, an old line friend of labor and the farmers, ran on the Progress Party ticket with strong AFL backing. He drew an impressive 17 percent of the total vote.

That same year, Samuel Gompers died, leaving a heritage of admiration and respect and a philosophy of trade unionism that still today underlies much of labor's thinking. His successor was William Green, who guided the destinies of the Federation until his death in 1952. Green, born in Coshocton, Ohio, in 1873, left school to become a coal miner, joined the union, and served as Mine Workers secretary-treasurer for a dozen years before being elected AFL president. An earnest and dedicated trade unionist, Green presided over the AFL with calm dignity during a difficult period—the depression years and the years of the division of the labor movement.

The decade of the 1920s drifted on a downhill course for the labor movement. Virulent anti-unionism, the steady, creeping ascent of unemployment, and the complacent political climate engendered by the Hoover Administration had a decidedly negative effect on the fortunes of the AFL, its unions and America's working men and women in every part of the country, in every sector of the economy.

Depression, War and A Labor Schism Healed

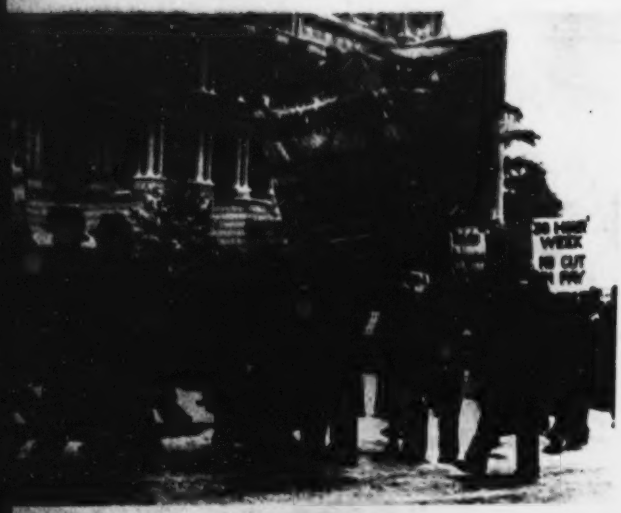
December 1931—the 50th anniversary of the creation of the modern labor movement—found America and much of the world sliding down the much steeper slope of a cataclysmic economic depression. Business enterprises failed by the thousands, production plummeted, unemployment went through the roof. By 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President, the American economy was in chaos—and the American trade union movement was but a ghost of its former strength and numbers.

Roosevelt, taking the leadership of the all but paralyzed nation on March 4, 1933, undertook a number of programs designed to recharge the economy, feed the unemployed and restore confidence. At his urging, Congress passed the National Recovery Administration; the NRA's Section 7a specifically placed on the statute books the right of unions to exist and to negotiate with employers. Although it had no real enforcement powers, Section 7a was seen by millions of workers as a green light—if not a government invitation—to join a union.

Many AFL unions took quick advantage of the new atmosphere and soon began to register spectacular gains in membership. Some issued leaflets suggesting that "President Roosevelt wants you to join the union."

The Supreme Court soon declared NRA unconstitutional, and Section 7a was no more. Under the leadership of Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, Congress in 1936 enacted the National Labor Relations Act—known as the Wagner Act. It went beyond "7a" to establish a legal basis for unions; set collective bargaining as a matter of national policy required by the law; provided for secret ballot elections for the choosing of unions; and protected union members from employer intimidation and coercion. That law, as amended in 1947 by the Taft-Hartley Act and in 1959 by the Landrum Griffin Act, is still in force.

The surge in union membership in the early years



Unemployed workers' rallies and sitdown strikes (above) marked the Depression, followed by labor's war efforts —symbolized by Rosie the Riveter (far left) and an AFL visit with President Roosevelt.

of the New Deal, and the potential for organizing the important non-union mass production industries like steel, automobile, rubber, textile and others, led directly to the most serious schism in the history of the modern labor movement. Heads of a number of the industrial unions in the AFL, led by John L. Lewis of the Mine Workers, called upon the AFL to finance and support big organizing campaigns in the non-union industries on a basis that all the workers in each industry would belong to one industrial, or "vertical," union. Most of the leaders of the AFL unions presided over craft, or "horizontal" unions, and they maintained that employees of the same skills or crafts in the unorganized industries should sooner or later belong to their organizations.

In November 1935, Lewis announced the creation of the CIO—the Committee for Industrial Organization—composed of about a dozen leaders of AFL unions, to carry on the effort for industrial unionism. Lewis, born in Iowa in 1880 of Welsh immigrant parents, went to work in the coal mines and became president of the Mine Workers in 1920. An orator of remarkable virtuosity, Lewis voiced increasingly bitter attacks on his colleagues on the AFL Executive Council; his words helped speed the break. In 1936, the various CIO unions were expelled from the Federation—because, said Lewis, they favored industrial unionism; because, said AFL President Green, they had flouted procedures and rules of the AFL. In 1938 the CIO held its first constitutional convention and became the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

In any event, the CIO began a remarkably successful series of organizing campaigns—and in rapid succession, over the next few years, brought industrial unionism to large sectors of basic American industry. After U.S. Steel signed with the CIO Steel Workers in the spring of 1937, major organizing efforts brought, during the next few years, first signed agreements—most frequently after strike action—with major corporations in the steel, auto, rubber, glass, maritime, meat packing and other mass production industries. At the same time the unions remaining in the AFL registered even more substantial gains in membership.

The growth in union strength of both the AFL and CIO throughout the period, coupled with Roosevelt's domestic program, led to passage of a number of national social programs long advocated by the labor movement: among them, the national social security program, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, and a federal minimum wage-hour law (the original minimum hourly pay set by the 1938 statute was 25 cents an hour).

During World War II, the AFL and CIO, while preserving areas of disagreement, began to find more substantial bases for working together on problems affecting all workers. Philip Murray, who succeeded Lewis as president of the CIO, and AFL President Green served jointly and cooperatively on a number of government commissions involved in the war effort. Murray, born in Scotland in 1886, came as a boy to the coal fields of western Pennsylvania, and through his negotiating talents and oratorical ability rose

through the Mine Workers ranks to vice president. Murray headed the CIO's Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1936, and in 1942 he was elected president of the new United Steelworkers, a position he retained while serving as head of the CIO.

In 1952, Murray died, and was succeeded by Walter P. Reuther of the United Automobile Workers. Reuther, born in 1907 as one of four sons of a socialist brewery worker in Wheeling, W.Va., moved to Detroit during the depression and became a skilled worker in the auto industry. He was one of the prime organizers of the Auto Workers and after World War II won a closely contested battle for the UAW presidency, a post he held until his death in an airplane crash in 1970. Just a few weeks after Murray's death, William Green died, and was succeeded by George Meany, the AFL secretary-treasurer. Many of the old antagonisms had died out, many of the old issues had been resolved, and the stage was set for merger of the two labor groups. They were reunited into the AFL-CIO at a convention in New York opening on Dec. 5, 1955.

George Meany was unanimously elected president of the merged labor federation, and a new chapter opened for the American labor movement. Meany, born in the Bronx, N.Y., in 1894, followed his father's footsteps as a plumber, became active in his local union, and was elected president of the New York State Federation of Labor in 1934. On the basis of a brilliant record of helping win enactment of state labor and social legislation, he was elected AFL secretary-treasurer, to fill a vacancy, in 1939.

The AFL-CIO Years

George Meany's commitment to "the traditional objectives of the labor movement" was expanded in his role as AFL-CIO president, to include labor's "full contribution to the welfare of our neighbors, to the communities in which we live, and to the nation as a whole." In the 25 years after the merger, a number of important issues and trends emerged; they embrace both the tradition or improving working conditions and a new emphasis on issues involved in local, state, national and international affairs.

While labor's interest in politics was by no means new, the development of COPE—the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education—brought to labor a more efficient and practical means of achieving these three goals: (1) To make workers aware of the records and promises of the candidates running for public office. (2) To encourage workers to register and to vote. (3) To endorse candidates at local, state and national levels.

The AFL-CIO merger and its accompanying agreements brought about the virtual elimination of jurisdictional disputes between unions that had plagued the labor movement and alienated public sympathy in earlier years. The unions placed a new priority on organizing workers in areas, industries and plants where no effective system of labor representation yet existed. In many cases, it meant crossing the barriers of old thinking and tired methods to reach the employees of companies which for years had resisted unions.

A major phenomenon of this period was the rapid growth of unions of government employees—federal, state and local. For many decades, postal employees, teachers, the fire fighters, and building and metal trades workers in some federal installations represented about the only substantially unionized part of public sector employment. With increasing economic pressures, more public employees turned to unions—a trend spurred on by such developments as an Executive Order by President Kennedy in 1962 underscoring the right of federal employees to join unions and negotiate on many issues, and by various statutes in the states and cities providing for various forms of collective bargaining with their personnel.

Throughout the years after World War II, women

American workers and their unions reached a milestone in the merger of the AFL and CIO (far left) in 1955. In the quarter-century since then, some of the jobs those union workers did changed dramatically—and others remained the same.

On the Farm: Workers Seek Equality

The generally unenviable plight of agricultural workers has for many decades been a thorn in the American social conscience. Large numbers of migrant farm workers—most of them blacks or Hispanics from the South and the Southwest, as well as workers who have entered the country either on temporary work passes or illegally from the Caribbean and Mexico—have been excluded from the legal protections afforded to most workers in industry and commerce.

Suffering from low pay, abominable temporary housing, lack of access to decent schools for their children, and often deprived of adequate medical care or safety protection measures, the migrant farm workers have been too often the "forgotten people" of the American economy.

In recent years, the Farm Workers union—in the face of great difficulties—has been able to organize some of them, principally in California, and bring them the benefits of collective bargaining.

Public response, in the form of consumer boycotts of grapes and lettuce at various times, has helped their cause. The beginnings of legislation, both federal and state, and attention to their plight in the press and on television, have brought some relief to the farm workers. But much remains to be done.

entered the workforce in ever increasing numbers, and especially significant was their entry into "nontraditional" occupations. A long sought objective—equal pay for equal work—was passed by Congress in 1963, prohibiting economic discrimination on the basis of sex.

Five years later, the Age Discrimination Act was passed to assist persons in the older brackets of the workforce.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, strongly supported by the AFL-CIO, was a significant forward step toward equal rights for blacks and other minorities, at the workplace and in the community. President Johnson, in signing the act into law, acknowledged that it could not have happened without the affirmative support of the AFL-CIO.

The Civil Rights Act could trace its legislative history back to the days of World War II, when A. Philip Randolph, president of the AFL Sleeping Car Porters, persuaded President Roosevelt to issue an Executive Order establishing a Fair Employment Practices Commission. Randolph, a brilliant union officer and civil rights champion, managed to convince FDR that governmental action to stop discrimination in hiring and promotion was essential to the wartime production effort.

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. illustrate the common bonds among labor, blacks, Hispanics and other minority groups: "Our needs are identical with labor's needs—decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community."

Throughout these years, the AFL-CIO was forced to resist various efforts to limit the rights of unions. The so-called "right-to-work" bills, which in fact were aimed at outlawing contract language providing union security, arose in many states. In Congress there were continued efforts to expand the Hobbs Act to make every picket-line scuffle or act of violence

a federal case, even though they are currently covered by state and local laws.

The increasing interest in safety on the job, heightened by the introduction of new and potentially dangerous materials used in a wide variety of industries, gave rise to labor's intensive support for a federal Occupational Safety and Health Act, which became law in 1970. Specifically, the act authorized the Secretary of Labor to establish health and safety standards, to enforce them, and to listen to employees' legitimate complaints about conditions at the workplace.

Full employment was and continues to be a first-rank concern of the AFL-CIO, with its vivid recollection of past unemployment. The unions have kept insisting that whoever is able and willing to work should not be denied this opportunity. The full employment concept was endorsed by labor in its successful drive for passage of the Employment Act of 1946, which had the support of President Truman. The Humphrey-Hawkins Act of 1978 re-expressed the need to direct full attention to the problem of unemployment in the United States.

Recognition that workers have interests as consumers as well as producers has been apparent in the labor movement for many decades. Unions have played an active role in the formation of consumer cooperatives, and at both national and local levels have worked with other citizen groups for the enactment of various forms of consumer protection legislation. At the same time unions have voiced concern that apparent "bargains" of goods imported from low-wage countries may in fact be of inferior quality or workmanship and thus, in the long run, more expensive for the consumer. In recent years, there has been a vast increase in imported manufactured goods—often produced by corporations directly or indirectly related to American conglomerate companies—and the AFL-CIO has called for a revitalization of American manufacturing industries.

The strengthening of free unions throughout the world is another ongoing objective of the AFL-CIO. Special agencies functioning within the framework of the AFL-CIO carry out many of labor's efforts to move toward this goal, which was constantly expressed by George Meany: to build strong, free, non-communist unions in the democratic societies of the free world and to resist all forms of tyranny and political repression. In fact, resistance to domination of workers and their organizations by governments or by political parties, or the control of unions by right-wing or left-wing extremist groups, has been a constant theme of American labor during the entire post-war period.

As the federal government broadened its range of social and economic programs from the 1930s onward, trade union interests also expanded. To meet its responsibilities to its members and as "the people's lobby," the AFL-CIO maintains a staff of experienced professionals in the fields of law, education, legislation, research, social and community services, civil rights and allied disciplines.

In addition groups of unions have developed autonomous departments of the AFL-CIO to meet specialized needs. The first of these, the Building and Construction Trades, was set up back in 1916. The Industrial Union Department was created in the AFL-CIO merger agreement. Other departments include the Union Label & Service Trades, Maritime Trades, Metal Trades, Food & Beverage, Professional Employees and Public Employees.

The George Meany Center for Labor Studies, established in 1969, plays an increasingly important role in training labor union staff and officials through a range of courses from techniques of collective bargaining to labor law institutes.

Meany retired at the AFL-CIO convention in 1979, at the age of 85; he nominated Lane Kirkland as his successor, and Thomas R. Donahue was elected secretary-treasurer. Kirkland, born in South Carolina in 1922, had been a merchant marine officer during World War II, and became a member of the Master, Mates & Pilots Union. He joined the staff of the AFL in the post-war years; filled a number of increasingly responsible positions, including that of executive assistant to Meany; and was elected secretary-treasurer of the Federation in 1969. Donahue, born in New York in 1928, served in many capacities for the Service Employees Union, both with its Local 32B in New York and as vice president of the international union. He was named in 1973 as executive assistant to Meany.

Under their leadership, the base of organized labor's effectiveness has remained firmly cemented in the unity and enthusiasm of its members. Grassroots strength and commitment were highlighted by an unprecedented 'Solidarity Day" demonstration that drew more than 400,000 union members to Washington, D.C., in 1981.

The AFL-CIO also is confronting the challenges posed by revolutionary changes in the nature of work and the composition of the workforce. In 1985 the federation issued a landmark report, "The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions," with specific recommendations aimed at bringing about a "resurgence" of the labor movement.

Among the early products of these recommendations is an office of Comprehensive Organizing Strategies and Tactics to help affiliates develop innovative approaches to organizing. Also being explored are new concepts of benefits and services to members beyond those traditionally achieved through collective bargaining, such as a low-interest-rate credit card and supplementary health and life insurance.

Thus, the AFL-CIO continues to demonstrate the resiliency and the ability to adapt to change that have marked the American labor movement for more than 100 years.

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